

Photo courtesy of Dennis Smith

These five bronze figures, called "Summer Games" by Dennis Smith, stand in Columbus, Ga., site of the 1996 Olympic women's fastpitch softball competition.

Highland artist has work displayed at site of Olympic softball contest

By LAURIE WILLIAMS SOWBY
Special to The Daily Herald

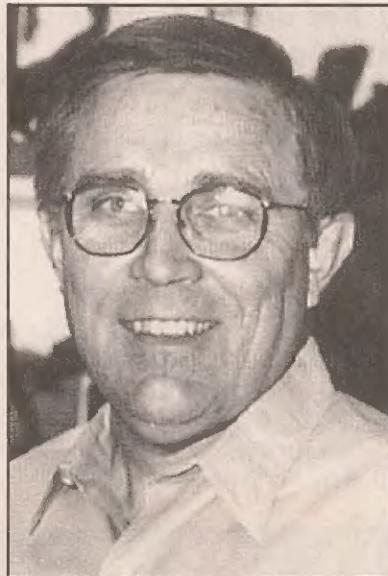
Dennis Smith, Highland, has a part in the 1996 Summer Games — but don't look for him in any of the athletic events. The artist, known for his whimsical assemblages and his bronze statues of children at play that grace several Utah buildings, got the chance of a lifetime in a commission for the Olympics.

His "Summer Games" is five life-size bronze figures of kids playing sandlot softball. The batter, pitcher and fielder are girls, while the base runner and catcher are boys. The pitcher is ready to throw the ball as the other four figures anticipate the pitch. "This moment of anticipation is the central poetic theme of all my work," Smith explained.

The piece stands in Columbus, Ga., site of women's fast-pitch softball during the Atlanta games. The city originally asked for a sculpture of a woman throwing a pitch, but Smith convinced them that the children playing sandlot ball would have a more universal quality.

"Summer Games" is among 80 commissioned pieces of public art now on display, more than half of them sculpture. The works have been placed along roadways, in parks and in well-traveled public places in and around Atlanta through the combined efforts of corporate sponsors, art organizations donors, government and non-profit agencies, and volunteers. Smith feels honored to have his work there.

But the 54-year-old artist also got the scare of a lifetime recently with a heart attack that prevented his being in Georgia for the unveiling of his work. The piece, com-



Dennis Smith

missioned by the City of Columbus and completed after a year, had an informal unveiling at Salt Lake City's Franklin Quest Field — where Smith threw out the first pitch at a Buzz game — before it was shipped to Atlanta.

The heart attack came a week or two later. The small chance of a blood clot's occurring during the flight to Atlanta was a chance Smith decided not to take.

So as the Games begin, Smith's back at work in his foundry in Orem and rethinking his life and priorities.

"It's affected my life pretty dramatically," he said. "It was a good wake-up call. I'm taking better care of myself now. I have more energy than I've had in years. I'm eating better and losing a little weight, and I'm healthier than I've been for a long time."

His perspective's changed too.

"You suddenly look at everything differently. You're suddenly

conscious of the finite quality of your life and realize you're not going to be around forever."

Doing what he really wants to do has become a priority. Smith's welded found-object assemblages are his favorite to do, yet haven't been the most profitable, so he was waiting until he had time to do them.

That was before.

The heart attack made him step back and take another look. "If I suddenly died, all the material I've collected for 20 years to make assemblages out of would be just so much junk," he said.

"It's made me conscious of all the things I really want to do," he continued. "I've always been a pleaser, a nice guy, but the heart attack has made me conscious of that aspect of my work that I tend to shelve. Sometimes it's my most effective work, so I've learned that it's important to focus on those things as well."

The prolific artist has been steadily supplying 14 galleries around the U.S. with his paintings and sculptures, and he's been at the beck and call of designers and architects. Now he's rearranged his priorities and his studio schedule to leave time for the found-object assemblages.

And he's working toward a late September show of his paintings, sculptures and assemblages at Gallery 56 in Salt Lake City.

"I'm getting a lot done and enjoying it more than ever," Smith said. He noted that there's much less stress, now that he's doing what he wants to. And with the heart attack behind him, he's looking toward a bright future.

"I want to do a lot of really exciting things that I've sidelined," he said, then added, "and do them on my own terms."

Tuesday, July 23, 1996

ICAN SPIRIT

In Festival Opera's theme

acting and singing.

"1776" is a show anyone could enjoy and learn from. But opera neophytes need not be

tenor Ballam himself as the adamant and admirable John Adams. Francis J. Cullinan returned to Logan to direct this

looks and sounds just like what you'd expect him to. Other notable performances here (and there are more than can be listed briefly) are by Jonathan Hays as Edward Rutledge, Melvin Lowery as the alcoholic Stephen Hopkins, and Michael Krueger as the egotistical, obnoxious Richard Henry Lee. Soprano Joy Hermalyn is a perfect Abigail Adams; the tenderness between her and her absent husband John (Ballam) is almost palpable.

There's plenty of humor in the dialogue as well as the musical numbers, offset by the pathos of "Momma, Look Sharp" (sung by Brady Ashworth) and dramatic tension of Rutledge's accusatory "Molasses to Rum to Slaves." It's a powerful moment when the bell tolls and the scrim falls at the end, at last revealing the signatures of the signers.

— the story of the unfolding of the Declaration and the problems that nearly spelled its demise, set the patriotic, celebratory tone of the season, with Ballam as the adamant and admirable John Adams.

frightened away by either of the other two offerings — light-hearted stagings of Puccini's "La Fanciulla del West" ("Girl of the Golden West") and "Don Pasquale," by another Italian composer, Donizetti.

The musical "1776" — the story of the unfolding of the Declaration of Independence and the problems that nearly spelled its demise — set the patriotic, celebratory tone of the season, with

one; the orchestra was conducted by Mark Ferrell.

It's a wonderful historical show that portrays our forefathers as entirely human as they struggle with personal frailties, their constituents and each other.

Casting couldn't have been better. Thomas Jefferson (Daryl Henriksen) is tall and reticent, John Hancock (Bruce Newbold) is authoritative and dignified, and Ben Franklin (Shawn Roy)

complete happy ending

falling snow. Scenic design is also notable.

It's quite an enjoyable production — and the only opera Puccini wrote with a happy ending. The audience will be smiling all the way through.

llent as Ramerez, is clearly and filling powerful tenor voice. Montgomery is credible as but harder to hear. The mostly men — puts out uses. Lots of action, and the technicians once touches like falling

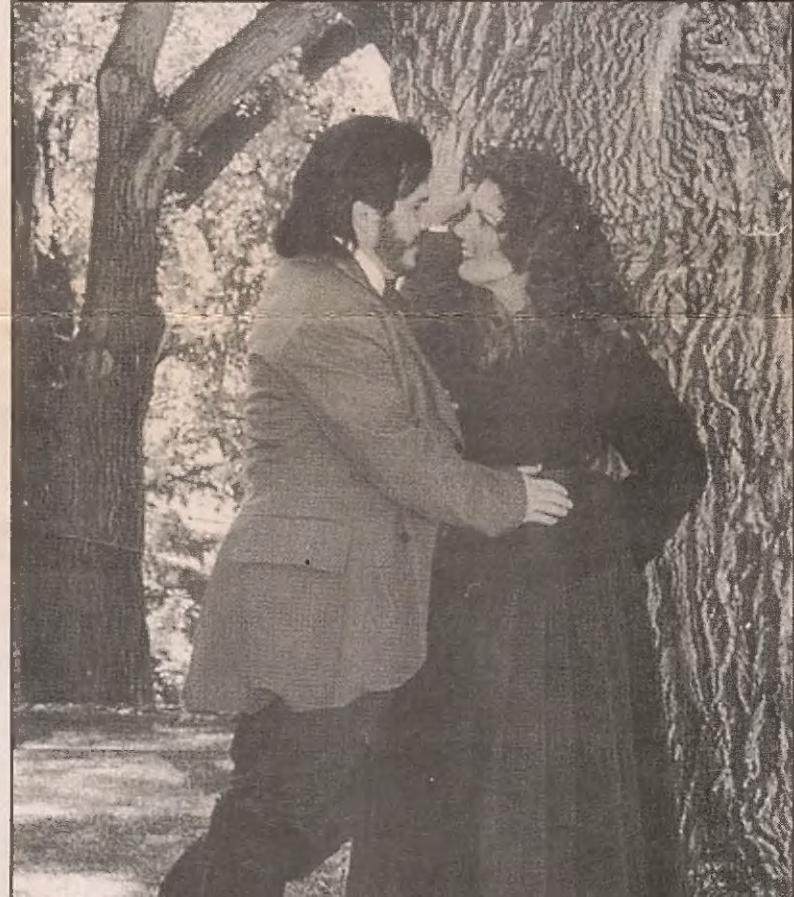


Photo courtesy of Utah Festival
Opera Company